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1560/40

OBSERVATIONS

UPON

SCOTCH FISHERIES, EMIGRATIONS,

AND THE

MEANS OF IMPROVING

THE

HIGHLANDS AND ISLES.

OFFERED TO THE ATTENTION OF HIS
ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF
WALES, STEWART OF SCOTLAND
AND LORD OF THE ISLES.

By HUGH BELL,
BREWER, BURGESS, AND GUILD BROTHER OF
EDINBURGH.

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1792.

1560/40.



OBSERVATIONS, &c.

DR SMITH, in his *Wealth of Nations*, tells us, that the fecundity of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland is great; twelve children are common, even twenty is no matter of surprise, and yet of such amazing numbers, fewer are raised to puberty than from the pampered beds of the metropolis. The rest, like the premature blossoms of the spring, are carried off by the wretchedness that always attends want. Of such as survive the miseries of infancy, part stick to the soil, part enlist in the army, and many are obliged to cross the Atlantic in hopes of earning daily bread; while so large a track of the British Empire is abandoned to want, our viceroys are clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare
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sumptuously every day : One may ask of them, Didst thou ever, like the paternal Harry of France, eat brown bread in the house of a peasant ? The splendour of Versailles, and the indigence of the peasantry, is one of the justest reproaches that is urged against the splendid, the bloody, the unjust, and the oppressive reign of Lewis the XIV. We read, with detestation and horror, the massacre of the holy innocents that was perpetrated by Herod the Idumean, the place man and pensioner of the Romans ; whilst thousands of innocents in the Highlands and Islands are annually murdered by shameful neglect : This surely is a just reproach against any government, and any ministry. We see, in the history of man, that a mother exerts extra-attention in favour of the weak and infirm part of her offspring. Paternal care of the state ought to be exerted in the same manner ; and something special should be provided for the weak and infirm part of the national family. Seven Highland regiments
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are now wasting their blood in the wars of the East, whilst their nighest relations are wretched at home. Humanity, justice, gratitude, and prudence all established a fund of credit in favour of these neglected and desolate regions. It is evident, that agriculture and pasturage can never support an extensive population in the Highlands. We observe with pleasure, that benevolent and beneficent individuals, propose to establish manufactures in these countries: The public at large wishes well to their most laudable endeavours. The utility of the Scotch fishery has been so often demonstrated, and so often admitted, so great a variety of statutes have been enacted and repealed, that the subject is always resumed as a heavy task, in the same manner as one hears declamation against the degeneracy of the age, or the waste and corruption of ministers. By perseverance, the Portuguese doubled the Cape of Good Hope; by perseverance, Czar Peter established his capital. The fishery in the
Highlands

Highlands and Islands, by the bounty of nature, holds forth an ample means of subsistence. Boswell, and his travelling governor, in their excursions to the Hebrides, lamented that they did not carry with them a parcel of lines and hooks for the use of the neglected natives.

What food, what clothing, what fuel, what sort of cottage can we expect to find in the possession of a person whose stock amounts not to the purchase of lines and hooks, and where the joint stock of the parish amounts not to the purchase of a small boat, nets, salt, &c. Our viceroy's, however, are not ashamed to see these people wasting their blood in defence of the state. It is easy to censure; to correct, however, is difficult. In order to promote the fishery, it is necessary, *1st*, to remove difficulties. *2^{dly}*, to grant encouragements. Dr Anderson, after visiting the Hebrides, gives it as his opinion, that our absurd attachment to customhouse system, and the jealous

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lousy of our salt duty laws, are complete negatives against extending the fishery. This requires explanation. At present duty free salt is allowed to a fisher under certain conditions; when he proposes to get such salt he must sail from the creek of his own residence to the nearest custom-house, which is often distant a hundred miles. This, of itself, is a negative. When the fisher gets his duty free salt, he must grant a bond, and prove the expenditure of the salt. The place of the proof, and other circumstances, create delay and expence. These difficulties ought to be removed.

Dr Anderson finds no remedy so sure as abolishing the salt duties altogether; this, no doubt, would have a most glorious effect, in the issue it would increase the general revenue; it would, however, create a temporary loss, and therefore the abolition need not be asked. New ideas subject one to the imputation of a state emperick or projector.

Encourage-
ment 1st.

projector. Let us be superior to ridicule ; let us imitate the great Lord Verulum, and try experiments. Begin a line at Roseneath in the mouth of Clyde ; extend this line round the Hebrides, the West Highlands, Shetland, Orkney ; continue the line to Inverness ; and from thence to the point of offset in Clyde. Grant to the country, contained within the line, an exemption from the duty on salt. His Majesty's Exchequer would feel little or no diminution of revenue, and the country above described, would acquire a cheap vital, principle of industry and of population. At present, duty free salt is allowed for curing cod, ling, tusk, salmon, and herrings for exportation, and for curing herrings consumed at home. As a further and as a certain encouragement, let fish consumed at home be allowed salt duty free. The cod fishery of Scotland was never pushed to the hundredth part of its possible extent, whilst the French, at present, employ 48,000 ton
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Encourage-
ment 2d.

of shipping in the cod fishery of Newfoundland.

If the coast of France abounded with cod, &c. to as great an extent as the coasts of the Highlands and Islands ; in such case, the French Newfoundland fishery would soon be abandoned.

The use of salt in the kitchen and at the table, and the use of salt employed in the fishery ought to be attended with very different regulations. This is founded upon the nature of things. A fat bullock is led from the pasture to the shambles, and, whether salted or used fresh, the manufacture, so to speak, is very limited ; whereas, in the fishery, there is a complication of expence and of labour, viz. a sea vessel with a suitable number of hands, and a compleat outfit, hooks, lines, nets, casks, salt, provisions, hazard, time, additional cloths, all enter into the fishing arrangement ; to which let us add a hardy nume-

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rous race of seamen, thereby secured to the British flag ; and the lives of thousands of children who at present are annually murdered by shameful neglect, thereby preserved to the state.

Whenever any manufacture, trade, or interprise is established upon principles originally and radically wrong, it is impossible that the highest after exertions can ever make such trade to prosper. If custom-house system, and the jealousy of salt duty laws, obstruct the fishery in its first stages, it is evident that bounties upon exportation can have no effect. If the whale fishery was limited to boats of fifteen tons burden ; if the pilchard fishery in the channel, was limited to vessels of five hundred tons burden, we could catch neither pilchard nor whale ; and like the foolish and alegorical virgins of Palestine, we literally, and in fact, would have no oil in our lamps. In this point of view, the bounty upon the herring buss fishery, is founded upon principles

ples the most absurd that possibly could be imagined. The framers of the law beheld every object through the medium of the wealth of London. They beheld nothing through the medium of the stock of the Highlanders and Islanders, in whose hands, in the nature of things, the Scotch fishery only can be established. A herring buss must be a decked vessel of fifteen tons burden at least. She must have five mariners on board, and, in general, every buss of five tons additional burden, must have one additional hand. She must have new barrels to hold her specified quantity of salt; she must have a specified number of new barrels to hold her supposed quantum of fish; and, *lastly*, she must have 250 square yards of netting for each ton of her burden. So that a buss of twenty tons must have no less than 5000 square yards of netting. Here are assembled a wonderful arrangement of trammels and restraints. The buss, above described, is entitled to a bounty of twenty shillings *per* ton, though she

she catch no fish, and to a bounty of four shillings *per* barrel upon one specified part of her cargo of herrings, and to one shilling *per* barrel upon the remaining part. It would be a pleasant article of information to know the number of barrels of herrings that are caught and cured, under the above most extraordinary trammels and restraints. The historian and philosopher Hume gives, in his history of the Plantagenits, a curious parliamentary restraint in the article of cross bows, to which I refer. We ought certainly to adopt our regulations to the state of the people in whose hands the fishery, by the nature of things, must, if at all, be established.

Encourage-
ment 3d.

The people in question, very generally speaking, are incapable to fit out a bus as described by statute. Let them judge for themselves, and without restraints, let them fish with boats, mariners, nets, salt, casks, &c. suitable to their limited stock, and let the bounty in their favours be granted according

cording to the number of barrels of herrings, independent of tonnage.

I proposed at page 4th a special indulgence in favour of the Highlands and Islands in the article of salt. Dr Anderson states the net duty upon British made salt at 260,000 l. *per annum*. This tax, so injurious to industry and population, ought surely to be taken off by means of a proper commutation. No substitutional tax seems more accommodating, more certain, or less oppressive than 2 d. *per bushel* upon malt. It will yield 233,333 l. *per annum*; and will be found something less than a duty of 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ farthings upon a dozen quarts of porter. This seems a very small matter. We are, however, thereby relieved from the salt duty. Fish and salt provisions would be cheaper, and our fisheries would be freed from absurd trammels and restraints. Dr Anderson gives a 31 years statement of bounties and premiums upon
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the fishery. The highest amount is about 60,000 *per annum*. It seems highly probable, that, if the salt duty was commuted, the bounties and premiums might be withheld, or experimentally might be lowered. Salt makers, working with a lesser stock, probably would exert themselves to refine their salt. Still, however, there must be a duty upon foreign salt in order to give a preference to our own. Two shillings a bushel seems sufficient; and would not, in a great degree, hurt the fisheries. Even this duty of two shillings might be taken off in favour of the fisheries, and no doubt would have its effect, provided the method of giving foreign salt, duty free, is rescued from negating restraints.

In order to get quite of the salt duties that are so very injurious to the fisheries, I hope the above commutation will soon take place. The duty upon Scotch coal, water born and consumed in Scotland, is a most
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injudicious tax. The net amount, according to Dr Anderfon, is 3000 l. *per annum*.

Looking into the map of Scotland there seems, including part of Forfar, and part of Berwickshires, to be 17 counties that pay the above tax. Suppose the 17 counties to be in equal circumstances as to land, rent, &c. and to be willing to pay 3000 l. *per annum* by way of commutation, the assessment upon each county would be 176 l. *per annum*.

The treasury would lose nothing; and the country would acquire a great means of improvement. I leave it with the good people of England to bring forward a commutation for themselves.

Mr Knox's proposed canals are worthy of much attention; and would be completed at half the expence of a German subsidy, and at the hundredth part of the expence

Encouragement 4th.

expenditure of one campaign against the innocent natives of Hindostan.

Frederick, in his bloody war of unjust conquests, and in his desolating seven years war in defence of unjust conquests, certainly murdered, maimed, and rendered wretched more of the human race, than both the Triumvirates of antient Rome: If it is possible, that atonement can be made for murder, then it is possible that Frederick will not be damned for ever; because, in time of peace, he repaired the havock of war to every extent that could be effected by wisdom, power, and benevolence combined, (vide Dr Gillies). His kingdom, soon acquired a smiling appearance in the increased article of people, happily employed in agriculture, and every useful art. In a word, he colonized at home which is the wisest of all policy.

Villages and towns are wanting in the Highlands and Islands: A principle of
union

Union must be established, by which
 the scattered tribes may be induced to
 assemble and unite their efforts for mu-
 tual subsistence. Mark out, then, in the
 Highlands and Islands a number of Encourage-
ment 5th.
 stations best situated for navigation and
 for the fisheries. Bestow a small mat-
 ter upon cottages. To such stations, and
 in proportion to numbers at each station,
 grant immunities upon sundry articles of
 consumption, viz. coals, ale, spirits, soap,
 candles, and leather. To places so favoured,
 mankind would assemble as certainly as
 eagles assemble where carcases are to be
 found. Earnings would become adequate
 to subsistence, emigration would cease.
 The Highlands and Islands in a short
 time, and at a small expence, will become
 a populous, a useful, and a flourishing ad-
 dition to the British Empire. The above
 considerations are humbly offered to the
 attention of the Steward of Scotland, and
 Lord of the Isles.

F I N I S.

The first of these is the fact that the
 Government has been unable to secure
 the necessary funds to carry out its
 policy of non-interference. This is
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